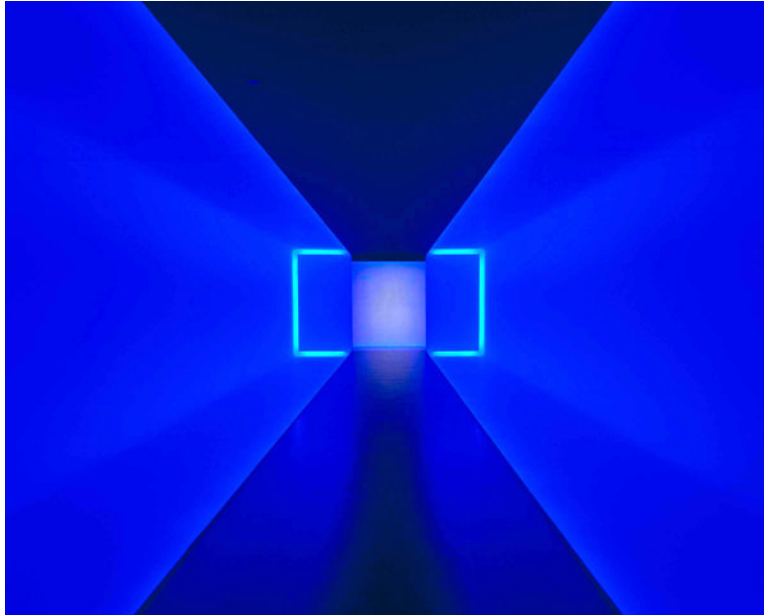


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INSIDE ART

James Turrell at Three Museums



By CAROL VOGEL
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James Turrell

LIGHTING UP THE MUSEUMS

“An artist whose work is known but rarely seen” is how Michael Govan, director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, recently described James Turrell. At the Venice Biennale two summers ago fans were so eager to glimpse one of Mr. Turrell’s transcendent light environments that lines began forming as soon as it opened. The permanent installations he has created in cities like Bentonville, Ark., and Houston, or further afield in Kanazawa, Japan, or Tilburg, in the Netherlands, have become popular destinations.

Mr. Turrell’s career has not been examined in depth in this country for decades, however. The last big retrospective in New York, for example, took place at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1980. But in May and June three American museums — the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston — are holding exhibitions devoted to the work of Mr. Turrell, who is 69. “Each place will have representative works, some made over time, others made for a particular place,” Mr. Turrell said in a telephone interview. “Every show will be unique.”

The idea of holding shows in three museums grew out of a desire by Mr. Govan to organize a traveling retrospective. The trouble was, he realized early on, many of the built installations are difficult to move.

The show in Los Angeles, which opens May 26, will be the most comprehensive, covering nearly five decades. It will include early geometric light projections, prints, drawings, installations and recent holograms. There will also be a section devoted to Mr. Turrell's epic "Roden Crater" — a site-specific intervention to reshape an extinct volcano just outside Flagstaff, Ariz. — with models, plans, photographs and films about it. Mr. Govan said that, to give visitors an immersive experience and to avoid overcrowded galleries, the museum will offer timed tickets and the show will be on view for nearly a year, through April 6, 2014.

The Houston museum's exhibition, which will run June 9 through Sept. 22, is focusing on seven light-based installations from the collection of the museum, which began collecting Mr. Turrell's work in 1994. It also commissioned a light tunnel by him that connects its Mies van der Rohe building to one by the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo. "The show is a mini-retrospective," said Gary Tinterow, the museum's director. In addition to the light installations there will be the artist's "Mapping Spaces" portfolio and other work related to his "Roden Crater" project.

In New York, from June 21 through Sept. 25, the Guggenheim's Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda will be bathed in light and color. "It will be an immersive experience, very contemplative," said Richard Armstrong, the Guggenheim's director. Other work by Mr. Turrell will be on view in the annex galleries.